

Farmingdale, NY— Thursday, Congressman Steve Israel (D-Huntington) joined with Long Island veterans to present Ivan McRae the Congressional Gold Medal he earned as a Tuskegee Airman. Legislation passed by Congress and signed by President Bush entitled McRae and his fellow Tuskegee Airmen to the Congressional Gold Medal in recognition of their heroism in World War II. Rep. Israel said, “Ivan McRae served his country when duty called, joining the fight against tyranny from abroad while advancing the cause of civil rights at home. Yet Mr. McRae and his fellow airmen didn’t receive appropriate thanks for their efforts at the time. The recognition for the service of the Tuskegee Airmen like Mr. McRae is long overdue and I am grateful for his service to our country.”

The Congressional Gold Medal, not to be confused with the Medal of Honor, is an award bestowed by the Congress in gratitude of great service and patriotism. Since the first such award was approved for George Washington in 1776, approximately 300 Congressional Gold Medals have been awarded. Other recipients of the Congressional Gold Medal include Rosa Parks, Nelson Mandela and Pope John Paul II.

In 2006, Congress passed H.R.1259, legislation co-sponsored by Rep. Israel to award the Congressional Gold Medal on behalf of the Tuskegee Airmen, collectively. The Tuskegee Airmen were World War II African-American pilots who broke the color barrier at home while fighting tyranny abroad. The presentation ceremony was held in the Capitol Rotunda on March 29, 2007. Following presentation by the President, the medal was given to the Smithsonian Institution, where it was to be displayed. Bronze replicas of the medal were made for individual Airmen, like the one Rep. Israel presented to Mr. McRae Thursday.

Mr. McRae was not able to attend the ceremony in 2007, but was able to secure a medal from Congressman Israel’s office. McRae, a Dix Hills resident, was working in Armonk NY at a train station when he heard screams from the waiting room where the attack on Pearl Harbor had just been announced. He enlisted in the Army Air Corps and was called into active duty in 1943. McRae participated in the historic Freeman Field Mutiny in 1945, when he and other African-American airmen forcibly integrated the all-white officers club, a chapter in the civil rights movement and major step in the eventual integration of the military.

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